

Deliberative Scenario: The Use of Prescription Stimulants for Enhanced Academic Performance

You are gathered as members of the school board to develop a policy about non-prescription use of prescription stimulants among high school students in the district. The school superintendent Dr. Garcia asked you to look at the issue in response to a newspaper article published six weeks ago. Dr. Garcia took some initial steps to investigate these reports, and has drafted a memorandum presented below for the school board to consider.

To: The Salem County School Board
From: Dr. Garcia
Re: Non-prescription use of prescription stimulants among Salem County students

Six weeks ago, an article published in the local newspaper suggested a widespread problem with non-prescription use of Ritalin and Adderall. The article quoted students as saying that use of these pills was widespread and that they felt pills helped them study. Students described having easy access to pills through friends or from their own doctors by complaining of vague symptoms to get a prescription. The newspaper also interviewed a recent graduate who was hospitalized for addiction to a common painkiller. The former student said that the addiction started with regular use of stimulants for studying, but had evolved over time.

The newspaper article noted that at Randolph Prep, an elite private school located in the county but not subject to school board supervision, the use of prescription stimulants was "rampant." It also stated that use among the children of the rich and powerful was widely considered to be a "necessity" for keeping up with the array of advanced placement courses and extracurricular activities designed to gain admission to the best colleges and universities.

(Cont.)

I followed up on claims made in the newspaper article by speaking to doctors who prescribe Ritalin and Adderall. Several doctors described feeling like they had been pushed toward prescribing stimulants by both students and parents. Students come to doctors essentially demanding prescriptions saying, "either I will get pills from you, or I will get them from classmates." Meanwhile, parents come to doctors expressing concern about grades and college acceptances, worrying that without this prescription, their child might have a competitive disadvantage. The doctors also noted that stimulants like Ritalin and Adderall can have serious side effects including increased heart rate, mood swings, and acute exhaustion or psychosis, and that little is known about the long-term effects of prescription stimulants on the developing brain.

Finally, I spoke with law enforcement officers who noted that Adderall and Ritalin are classified as Schedule II drugs (in the same class with cocaine and heroin). One student merely giving another student a pill is a felony. According to federal sentencing guidelines, first-time possession of between five and 49 grams of Adderall can carry a minimum federal sentence of five years in prison. What kind of policy should we put in place re: this type of non-prescription use of stimulants?

To address this problem comprehensively, you have broadened the group of school board policy makers to include students, parents, teachers, doctors, law enforcement officers, and other stakeholders relevant to the decision making process.

Please come to the deliberation having read the following pieces of background information:

- [“Guide to Classroom Deliberation for Students and Teachers”](#)
- Room for Debate. (2015, April 1). Using Adderall to get ahead, not to fight A.D.H.D. *New York Times*. Retrieved April 19, 2016 from <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/04/21/using-adderall-to-get-ahead-not-to-fight-adhd>.
- Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues (PCSB). (2015, March). *Gray Matters: Topics at the Intersection of Neuroscience, Ethics, and Society*. Washington, DC: PCSBI, pp. 27-45. Available at: <http://bioethics.gov/node/4704>.